



1962: I'm in the Marine Corps stationed at the Naval Air Station at Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. Bunkmate is Floyd Kerrigan, a Yale graduate from Boston. Floyd has a 1960 BMW R60 motorcycle. I've never heard of BMW before nor ever dreamt of getting a motorcycle (I grew up in Lake Forest, Illinois, and the young men of Lake Forest didn't ride motorcycles—or, for that matter, join the Marine Corps). Floyd is a BMW disciple and begins to preach the BMW gospel—quality, quiet, smooth... the sounds... best touring bike in the world. Every weekend—Floyd driving—me hanging on in back—we ride the winding blue-line highways of Bucks County. Wind in my face—clouds, stars, trees and moon—all a blur. It is October, warm and gorgeous. I am hooked.

1963: Discharged with a \$1,200 severance. Fly home to Chicago. Check the Yellow Pages. Take a cab to 2950 North Ashland Avenue, a few blocks south of Irving Park: Abt BMW. Mike Abt is the owner. Mike is a successful dealer because he knows BMWs and is a skilled BMW mechanic—not because he is charming. It's near closing time. Mike is anxious to get home and doesn't care if he sells this year-old R60 or not. I am indecisive. I think maybe the smaller R50 might be better.

"Look," says Mike. "I don't care which one you buy or if you don't buy either. Just make up your mind so I can go home."

"Okay. I'll take the R60," I say.

"Good," says Mike. "Gimme \$675." I decide not to haggle and hand the money over. Then, mustering everything I learned in the Corps, I ask, "Could you show me how to drive it?"

"What?" says Mike. "I don't see no driving-school sign around here. You bought the bike. You should know how to drive it." I just look at him. "Oh, hell, listen up. This is the gearshift. That's the clutch. This is the brake. This is the throttle. You depress the clutch. Push the shift down one click to first gear. Let the clutch out and give it some throttle. When you get going a little, press the clutch in, shift up a click to second, let the clutch out, and give it some gas. Do the same thing for third and fourth gears. This turns the gas on and off. Okay, got it? See you later." Mike turns and goes inside, turns the sign to "closed," and locks the door.

Now I'm standing with my new BMW motorcycle on Ashland Avenue. It's rush hour. Have to drive to Lake Forest, about 50 miles away, to meet my parents for a "welcome home" dinner. In all those times riding with Floyd, he never taught me to drive the bike. Just kept telling how great BMWs were. I wish now Floyd had covered a little on driving.

Make it west on Irving Park to the Kennedy. Then Edens Highway North to 41 to the Deerpath exit. Only six blocks to go. It starts raining. Do not know about fresh rain on blacktop. Start to turn left. Hit the paint stripe. Bike slides out from under

me. I go sprawling. Not serious: Head covers a little scratched. A little blood coming through a rip in my shirt. Only four blocks to go. Hit another slippery batch. Over I go again, this time on the other side. Again no damage, but now blood coming from a cut on my other arm. Knee also a little bloody, but nothing serious. After that one, I decide to walk the bike the rest of the way to my parents' house. I reach the driveway. Mom is looking out the kitchen window. Sees this blood-covered figure walking up her driveway with a motorcycle. Lets out a shriek. Runs to the door. "Hi, Mom," I say. "Look, I got a motorcycle!"

So that's how it starts. Years go by. Lots of rides. Fun. No more accidents. Oh, one: hit the front brakes too hard on gravel and went over. Nothing serious.

1970: Get married.

1971: First son, Tom Jr.

1973: Buy a sidecar. Do not like it. Takes all the fun out of riding a motorcycle. But I do learn to lean left and go down the street with the sidecar up in the air, Tom Jr. screaming in delight. Neighborhood moms just screaming.

1973: Sell the sidecar. Still take Tommy for rides on the R60. He loves it.

1974: Drive by a 3.0CS coupe in a showroom. Didn't know the car existed. Beautiful—best-looking car I've ever seen. But way too much money. File it away.

1975: See a blue 3.0CS for sale at Jacobs BMW in Joliet (about 80 miles away). Preg-

nant wife and I drive to Joliet. As we drive in the dealer lot, her water breaks. Doesn't want to have the baby in jail town of Joliet, so I run into the showroom. "My wife's having a baby. Got to go. Don't sell that coupe. I'll be back tomorrow."

Race back to Evanston Hospital. 100 mph, through red lights, never see a cop. Make it in time. Ten minutes later Christopher is born. Next morning, back to Joliet. Walk in the showroom with cigars, "It's a boy," I yell, flipping cigars to everyone. "Where's my coupe?" Make the deal for \$7,200. Back to the hospital. Pick up Christopher in 1972 blue 3.0CS. Kid starts off in style.

This has been written about the BMW 3.0CS: "One of the 25 best-looking cars ever. They are timeless in design—smooth and spirited, beautifully engineered, solidly built, and blessed with what can only be described as soul—unusual for machines of such elegance and refinement. They com-

bine swiftiness and crisp handling with German sturdiness, Italian brio, and boundless cachet. And oh, the sounds! No engine ever sounded sweeter. You can't ask for more from any car at any price."

1983: Police call: Stopped Tommy for speeding on my R60. Can't take his license because he doesn't have one. Tommy, now twelve, and I have a serious discussion.

1985: Driving west on Lake St. in Wilmette. A coupe goes by, filled with kids. Wow, I say. Looks just like mine. Wait: It is mine! I do a U-turn. Catch up. It's Tommy with all his pals. Tommy and I have a very serious discussion.

1985: Get divorced. Lose the house but keep the coupe and the R60. Move across the lake to New Buffalo, Michigan. Eighty-acre farm with three barns. One—the one that doesn't leak—keeps the coupe high and dry.

1986: Sinatra was right: Love is better the second time around. Run into true love,

Like father, like son: Tom McComas père et fils share a love of adventure—and of BMWs, two wheels or four.



Charyl. From Detroit. Gorgeous. Smart. Funny. Loves Miles Davis and loves to drive stick. Boy, do I have the car for Charyl. We spend weekends zipping around the snaky two-lane blacktop highways of Southwest Michigan farm country. Stop at fresh-fruit stands. I mean fresh: Corn picked twenty minutes ago. We laugh a lot. We get married.

1991: We have a son, Jeffrey. Charyl also has Jack, a six-year old from her first marriage. So now we have Tom, Chris, Jack, and Jeff.

1992: Tom Jr. is living in California racing motorcycles. Japanese crotch rockets. I say he's going to kill himself. He says it's all my fault. "You got me started when I was two years old," he says.

"I also read books to you, but I don't see you working in a library," I say. Sounds to me like selective blame. Tommy becomes a professional racer but is better at crashing than winning, so he decides to go with what he's good at. Becomes a Hollywood stuntman.

(For the record: In Tom's last year of racing, he finished first eleven times out of a seventeen-race series and never finished lower than third. But racing didn't pay, so he went where the money was.)

1993: Tommy calls to tell me to see *Armageddon*. Doing stunts for Ben Affleck. "How will I know when it's you?" I ask.

"Anyone you see on fire, jumping from high places, or going through a window—that's me," says Tom.

I feel much better now about that money I spent sending him to U of C Santa Barbara.

Tommy works for John Frankenheimer on *Reindeer Games*. John Woo in *Pay-check*. Seven BMW Rocksters bikes in the show; six are destroyed doing various stunts. The production company chooses one of the seven to be the "hero" bike. The hero bike is never used in stunts, or any situation where it might get damaged. Because Tommy almost lost his left leg in a stunt that went wrong, the producers give the hero bike to Tommy. He gives it to me.

Tommy does twelve feature films with Affleck and has over 100 film, TV, and commercial credits (most recently doubling Jim Carey in *Yes Man*). Now a stunt coordinator and director. Guess those neighborhood terrorizing rides in the sidecar paid off.

So now I have a 1960 R60 and a 2004 Rockster which I am afraid to drive. Side by side in my garage, the R60, with enduro bags, looks better: Better design. Rockster is too bulbous, bloated, as if someone from BMW's cycle division stole some design ideas from Chris Bangle.

2004: Tommy buys an M5. "The car is sideways more than it is straight," he says. "With 500 horsepower, four doors, and a top speed near 200, it satisfies all my require-

ments. Leave the Porsche Turbos to the desperate housewives of Orange County. This is a real driver's car that's not concerned with whale tails, pomp and circumstance. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

2005: It's May and the first warm breezes are blowing. Charyl says a convertible would be fun. I find a 1991 320i with 21,000 miles. Mint. Black on black. In Northbrook, a suburb north of Chicago. Asking \$16,000, which is 5K over blue-book. We take cash. On the drive over, I explain to Charyl it is priced way too high, and even if it is mint, we're not fools

enough to pay that ridiculous price. I say don't worry, I know how to deal.

We get there and go for a test drive. Looks mint. Drives beautifully. We're hooked. I say I'll give you \$13,000 cash. Seller is a just-divorced lady. This was her husband's car and he traveled all the time—that's why so few miles. Lady says she wants \$16,000 and not a penny less. I start counting out the money, putting hundreds in stacks of ten. I figure she won't be able to turn down fourteen stacks of ten one-hundred-dollar bills. While I'm counting, the phone rings twice. Both are calls about the car and they want

to see it immediately. I keep counting. Get to fourteen stacks. I look up. Phone rings again. I add two more stacks. Two happy fools drive away in a mint '91 BMW 320i convertible for Sixteen Large.

2006: Just killing time. Have a few Rolling Rocks. Get on eBay. Search BMW coupes. Find a 1985 M635CSi Euro with 32,000 miles. Part of an exotic car collection. Kept in temperature-controlled showroom. Palm Beach, Florida. \$19,000. I call my pal Mike, a lawyer from West Palm. I ask him to go look at it. He calls back all excited. Tells me he had a 635CSi in the '80s but had to sell when he got married. It was his favorite car ever.

What about the M635CSi for sale? Says it's gorgeous. No dings. No rust. All original. He says if I don't buy it he will. Says the Euro version M6 is the best and most desirable of the big coupes. Not what I wanted to hear. "Buy it now" is at \$19,000. I do. Have it shipped. Arrives a week later. Sounded too good to be true—but it wasn't. Perfect. Gorgeous. All I have to do is take the tinting off the windows. Now I have the two classiest coupes BMW ever made.

2007: Old pal from the Corps calls. We start talking about old times. I ask about Floyd. He says Floyd was killed in Nam. Flying copters. Oh, no. All these years with BMW—all the fun and joy—I owe to Floyd. I've thought often of calling Floyd and thanking him for getting me started. But I never did. Never took the trouble to find where he was. So now what?

I know: I'll buy another BMW motorcycle in Floyd's memory

Always wanted an R27, and Charyl said she would ride if I got a smaller bike. R27 would be perfect. Hit eBay again. Find one in Toledo. Totally restored. Gorgeous. \$7,100. Done. Always loved the R27 but never liked the huge gap between the rear fender and the tire. Enduros would solve the problem. So I go on the BMW vintage forum and the opinions are mixed. Some say enduros can't be installed on an R27. Others say yes—and there's a picture. The picture does it. I find a pair on eBay for \$1,300. Guy from L.A. Turns out they are repros from China. Guy won't do anything, so I'm stuck. First bad deal on eBay. But they look great so I keep them.

I call my neighbor Ron, the miracle worker. Ron fixes everything—Herman Miller chairs, old Ford pick-ups, mowers, Tiffany lamps—anything. Takes him about three hours and five beers but he gets it done using the brackets that came with the bag. Only drills two extra holes in the bags. R27 looks gorgeous

Now I have a nice BMW mix—1962 R27, 1961 R60, 1994 Rockster, 1972 3.0CS, 1991 320i convertible, and 1985 M635CSi.

Thanks, Floyd. For everything. ♦



From joyrider to stunt rider: Tom McComas, Jr., really does wear proper motorcycle footwear.



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